

JULY 1918.

No. 3.

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SUDAN NOTES AND RECORDS

VOL. I.

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PRICE 15 P. T. (3/-).

Annual Subscription 50 P. T. (10/6).

BK 32.3

[TITLE PAGE]

SUDAN NOTES AND RECORDS

Volume I.

No 3.

INSTALLATION OF THE RET OF THE CHOL (KING OF THE SHILLUKS) BY P. MUNRO.

In writing the following description of the above event I have attempted to adhere as strictly as possible to what was actually observed. This is more difficult than it appears for two reasons : first it is almost impossible to keep the mind oblivious of the innumerable traditions which have attached themselves to the ceremony and which are set forth in the main by Seligman⁽¹⁾ and Westermann⁽²⁾, and secondly the constant ebb and flow of the very large company present make accurate observation of detail in some cases almost impossible. [124]

The small discrepancies noted in the actual ceremony as compared with the account of the same as given by Seligman p. 224 are, in my opinion, probably due to the fact that any enquirer would certainly be told of any existing traditions as regards various separate installations. The main essentials are the same, but in small details each installation probably varies in accordance with its special circumstances. For the sake of clearness I have divided this article into two sections : a) Necessary preliminary remarks; b) The actual narrative. [128]

(1) SELIGMAN Vol. B., *General Science*, 4th Report of Wellcome Research Laboratories, p. 216 et seq.

(2) WESTERMANN, *The Shilluk People*.

A. — PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

643 The previous Ret Fadiet wad Kwadker died on February 22nd, 1917. At his death there were various possible candidates for the Retship of whom however only two were of real interest: Shoti wad Ajang who owing to intrigue took up the attitude of claiming the Retship, and Fasiti wad Yor whose claim, upheld for him by certain chiefs, was supported by Government. Shoti's position was much weakened by two factors: a) by his presumptuous attitude which was contrary to all decent Shilluk tradition, which even considers it correct for the Ret to disappear from his house on hearing of his probable selection, and b) by the fact that his father Ajang was never legitimate Ret, having never entered Fashoda, but having been allowed to usurp the position, when the Mudir of Fashoda imprisoned the real Ret Kwadker. (N. B. The Shilluk rule of Retship makes it essential for the new Ret to be the son of a previous legitimate Ret, thus Shoti did not have the proper qualification.) Fasiti wad Yor, the most suitable member of the house, whose turn it was to have the Retship, was therefore selected for the honour. As was customary a period of interregnum ensued, 645 during which time, although the Ret-to-be utters judgements, he is merely voicing the matured opinions of a Council of elders. It was stated to me that this interregnum always continued till after new dura had been sown and was ready to harvest. The general expectation was that the installation would not occur till February, but Fasiti himself wished to have it completed at the first opportunity. This was most natural in view of the fact that there is no real recognition of the Ret as legitimate until after the actual installation and in consequence it is a period of grave insecurity. 647 therefore sent messengers to the village of Akurwa to ask if all things were ready for the bringing of Nyakang⁽¹⁾ to the ceremony. A short delay occurred owing to the people of Akurwa having to collect many ostrich feathers and also ambatch for the creation of the bodily appearance of Nyakang 649 (Tradition states that they obtain them from south of Jebelcin and that

⁽¹⁾ Nyakang. The semi divine hero and first king of the Shilluk race. Cf. SELIGMAN, p. 216. During the ceremony he is represented by a tall cylindrical body probably made of ambatch, covered with light blue cloth, and with a roundish mass of ostrich feathers as a head.

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any ostrich they may meet will stand until they have plucked the requisite feathers. Further they are believed to produce Nyakang from the river by stabbing a cow in sacrifice on the bank of the Nile).

When all was ready, Nyakang started on its journey with a large following and proceeded at a leisurely pace. The road is cleared for it from Kaka to Fashoda. It passed Kodok on 11th January 1918.

As Nyakang draws near, the selected Ret is supposed to go to Dabalu in Akwom and stay there for one night before the actual ceremony. In this specific instance Fasiti went to Akwom three days before the ceremony and was installed in Fashoda on the 4th morning. Different chiefs gave varying answers as to the number of nights which it was essential for the Ret to stay in Dabalu: it would appear however that the Ret really goes there when everything is nearly ready; but if for any reason some delay occurs, a day or two is considered immaterial, which is in accordance with all native Sudan custom. In the present instance I understand Ajang wad Amoich of Akwom, whose duty it was had neglected to give due notice to the Southern chiefs, and so Kwa Mal⁽¹⁾ only arrived on the 16th instead of two days earlier.

B. — NARRATIVE (JANUARY 17th, 1918).

I arrived Fashoda about 7.30 a.m. While waiting I examined the shrine of Nyakang⁽²⁾ from outside, and the temporary huts⁽³⁾ built for the Ret,

⁽¹⁾ Kwa (descendants of) Ma stated by WESTERMANN, p. 128 to be founded by a man and woman, who came down from above. They left children on earth: their home is Malakal. They receive from the Ret the black bull over which the Ret steps before crossing the Khor; this is their reward for whipping on any that dally in following the Ret.

⁽²⁾ The shrine of Nyakang consists of two well built circular mud huts with grass roofs surmounted by an ostrich egg and a spear blade. The whole is enclosed in a fence. The grey mud walls are painted in different coloured stripes with spots dotted on them as shown in Seligman's illustration of Nyakang at Famikang fig. 55. The guardian is an old ex-wife of the Ret; small children are also allowed to enter. No woman who is pregnant can enter the shrine. The guardian has a little hut apart.

⁽³⁾ About 30 yards distant there is a practical miniature of the shrine, a temporary building completely made of grass especially erected for the Ret to live in after the installation prior to his going up to his real house on the mound.

643 and also the official residence of the Ret⁽¹⁾. About 11 a.m. loud drumming in the distance gave us the first intimation that Nyakang was en route from its shrine in Nyagir and was now approaching Fashoda. In the distance on the slight slope north of Fashoda a large company could be seen with Nyakang and Dak⁽²⁾ borne aloft in the centre. Hundreds of Shilluk warriors were in attendance on Nyakang and its people. The men of Golbaing and Nyagir were acting as flank guards, and the whole array with the sun on its spears was most impressive. Once and again according to correct tradition Nyakang turned back and retraced its way to very near its starting point in Nyagir. This I understood to be indicative of Nyakang's uncertainty as to whether it would accept the new Ret and bestow on him its divine protection. The pauses and returns of the concourse became more frequent, but shorter in time and during them the warriors and maidens could be seen dancing. About this time a small band of four warriors sent by Fafiti appeared in Fashoda and proceeded to circle round it two or three times with the peculiar dancing stride of the Shilluks. This band was shortly increased to six in number, and finally took its stand on Nyakang's road. The blowing of a horn announced the appearance of the Ret's army from Akwom, a great crowd of warriors. They came on apace until near the small khôr about a quarter of a mile south of Fashoda — they were chiefly from the Southern sections, although Kodok itself immediately surrounded the Ret. It was impossible to see Fafiti himself as yet owing to the crowd.

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643 The small party of six above mentioned now plays its part as a post between the Ret and Nyakang. The messengers all ran at full speed and appeared to be changed at the half way post. They are taking offers from the Ret to Nyakang. At first Nyakang refuses them, and turns back. Eventually

644 ⁽¹⁾ His house consists of four fine built huts enclosed in a fence. The western hut is known as Du-Kot', and in it are kept the sacred stool, the spear, the sword and the shield. The Eastern hut is for the Ret's wives, and the other two are used for any thing the Ret likes. The stool etc. are brought out for the ceremony and redeposited in Du-Kot' afterwards.

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778 ⁽²⁾ Dak is the son of Nyakang : his effigy is much taller and thinner in body, but smaller in head than that of Nyakang. Both effigies are in charge of Ador son of Akol Adong of Akurwa.

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he accepts, and we are informed that one cow, one bull and five spears ²⁰² have been offered and taken. Further I was told that the messengers carry ⁶⁴³ straws symbolical of the above offers (the common practice of Shilluk accounting), but this I cannot vouch for, as we could not see it. When the amount has been fixed, Nyakang appeared to advance steadily and rapidly, only making one sharp rectangular turn in our direction, and as I understood that Nyakang's people could hold to ransom (in cows) any one whom ⁶⁸⁸ they caught, I made a slight alteration in my position.

At this moment from the side some seventy or eighty of the Ret's wives ⁶⁴³ came dancing towards Nyakang's army holding their hands out palm up ⁶⁴⁴ wards and chanting *ya bia, ya bia* «come come».

The Ret's army now moves rapidly forward to the khor. I saw in front a small black bull, across which the Ret is said to step before crossing the khor. Tradition states it is important for the new Ret to cross this khor dryshod. As there was still water there, Fafiti was taken across in his ⁵⁰¹ toror (Shilluk boat), but owing to the crowd I could not see this. Just as the army gets to the khor, there is a sudden headlong flight by every one, due to the right possessed by the Kwa Mal of flogging any one that tarries or delays crossing the khor with the Ret. The Kwa Mal apparently used their whips with good effect, and soon the whole army was across. For this service Fafiti gives the black bull to the Kwa Mal.

I could not distinguish Fafiti, who in accordance with custom was dressed ²⁹¹ in the ordinary Shilluk lau (cloth) and with a dingy red and yellow turban on his head. He was holding by his hand a tiny girl brought by the Kwa Okel⁽¹⁾. In front of him came the people of Kwa Okel dragging forward a white bull tail first. The two armies then meet. Nyakang and

⁽¹⁾ Kwa Okel. Founded by people that Nyakang found in the Shilluk country. They help in building the house of Nyakang when a king is crowned. They give one of their daughters to the king. The girl is known as Nya Kwer (*i. e.* a girl of the authorities, girl of taxes). ¹⁷³

They are sometimes identified with Kwa Kelo — a section founded by Okelo a servant of Nyakang who taught the Shilluks how to prepare the mul for the Tuki (hearth stones). Another tradition states that Okelo was a Nuba, whose sister was married by Nyakang (cf. Westermann, p. 129 et seq., lists of clans made out by Rev. D. Oyler, of Doleib Hill).

643 his followers immediately put to flight the Ret's Army with whips, and the Ret is captured by Nyakang. The Ret is then deserted by all but the small girl, and is surrounded by Nyakang's company. Fafiti could now be seen holding Nyakang by its cylindrical body, so that the ostrich feathers flaunted on his head.

After a pause Nyakang and the Ret, accompanied now by a large crowd, proceed to the old place of the pond at Fashoda. Here the white bull of Kwa Okel is again seen. It has been unwrapped in clothes and blindfolded and is closely surrounded by its own people. Nyakang, the Ret, and the small girl circle twice round this, and then the Ret is lifted up and carried at full length by the Ororo⁽¹⁾ in company with Nyakang which is also carried aloft. As they leave the place of the pond there is a great rush and the clothes are stripped of the bull and torn into shreds presumably to be kept as mementos. Nyakang and the Ret are then carried to the Shrine of Nyakang and in front of its threshold can be seen the sacred stool, which has been brought from the palace. This throne chair is a squat stool with four squat legs covered with white cloth and leopard skin. In front of the stool, to act as a veil, a large strip of white dammur with a small red line in it is held up. It is only effective to keep out the vulgar gaze on three sides, and at the back the Shrine of Nyakang should presumably prevent any one seeing what occurs.

Nyakang is then placed on the stool, and the Ret is said to hold its two front legs. Inside the cloth are three people, the Ret, the small girl of Kwa Okel, and the man holding Nyakang.

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614⁽¹⁾ Ororo. This class seems full of mystery: cf. Westermann, p. 129 et seq., §§ 10, 23, and 27. It is certain that the ancestor from whom they came was «Kwaret». According to Fafiti, they were the men of Odak son of Nyakang: a fight occurred between them and the Dinkas. All the older men were killed by the Dinkas, but some of the children were left. At this time Duwat should have become Ret, but his position was usurped, and much trouble fell upon the Shilluks. Finally Duwat came to his own, and he then took from these others the right of ever succeeding to the Retship. Since Duwat's time no one has become an Ororo although many have lost their rights of succession. Their present rights at an election are: a) to carry the Ret; b) to guard him throughout the ceremonies. Further at the death of a Ret they make the shroud. The Ret on election is given one girl as a wife from the children of the Ororo.

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Observation here was very difficult owing to the curtain, the moving crowd, and the fact that the Ret's most ancient wife would keep on dancing in front of the only possible view. [643] [123]

I therefore moved my position to where I noticed some ancient cronies, who were past the age of reverence and merely inquisitive, and from which place one could see behind the curtain. Shortly after I had moved the Ret's wazir was called for: he was Yomon wad Ker (Kwaniuret). Nyakang was then withdrawn by his attendant backwards and the Ret took his seat on the sacred stool. His wazir then grasped the two front feet of the stool presumably in token of the submission and fealty of the Shilluk race, and in recognition that Nyakang's mantle had descended upon him. [70]

Then occurs much tomtoming and dancing, in which the people concerned are wives of the Ret and people of Akurwa, while the Ret sat like a graven image on the chair. At this time I noticed smoke issuing from the temporary tukls and asked what it was for. I was informed that the Ret's wives were warming water for the ablutions. Presently when this was ready two or three of them came and washed the new Ret's feet in hot and cold water, the significance of which is that the Ret shall be neither too cold nor too hot with his people, i. e. just.

The Ret was then lifted up by the Ororo and carried to where a bull covered with a leopard skin had been brought by Kwa Ujalu⁽¹⁾ on the threshold of his "temporary hut". He appeared to make certain passes, four in number, over this with a large sword, which was handed to him. The bull was then speared and carried away struggling for a short distance, and the Ret was then taken to his hut, which ended the proceedings temporarily. As we left the scene, the sacred stool was carried past us by four men running and taken up to the Ret's palace on the mound. [482] [601] [782] [482]

I was told Fasiti was to stay in his temporary hut for three days, and at the end of that period is taken up to his palace.

⁽¹⁾ Kwa Ujalu is probably identical with Kwa Ajal, who were founded by Jal. They live at Nyol Wak and lay out the circle for building the house of Nyakang (cp. Westermann, p. 128 clan list compiled by Rev. D. Oyler of Doleib Hill). Local tradition says they have the right given them by Nyakang of taking captives any girls they may meet and holding them to ransom. [773]

126 Unfortunately I was unable to stay longer, and as the actual religious ceremonies had been safely completed, I asked Yuzbashi Hussein Farag, Mamur Kodok, to return to Fashoda on the 20th and take note of any further ceremonies. The following information is from notes given to me 643 by him: "Apparently the Ret went up to his palace from the «temporary hut» during the night of the 19th. On the 20th in the morning the Ret left his palace accompanied by a large crowd. He was dressed in a game skin, and with him was the sacred stool. His escort were holding the shield. Nyakang also left his shrine escorted by a great company of people. Then 541 there occurred the mock battle with dura stalks⁽¹⁾. When the two armies meet, the Ret's people as though frightened of the people of Nyakang, ran towards the palace. The young girl of Kwa Okel on this day was with Nyakang's people, and when the «battle» was joined, the Ret seized her and carried her off to his palace.

778 "Nyakang then returned to the Shrine, where he is said to remain till the rainy season. Four persons are left as his escort.

537 "The Ret is said to stay another three days in his palace and then come out and meet his chiefs. Every orator speaks in his turn and before talking 422 puts his spear on the ground. If his speech sounds good to the people, the drum is beaten as a token of applause. The spears laid down become 582 the property of the Ret. The young girl stays with the Ret till she grows up, and the Ret can then wed her to any Shilluk he pleases."

P. Munro.

Malakal, February 1918.

114 ⁽¹⁾ Seligman (p. 224) states the mock battle occurs at the khor before the ceremony. No dura stalks were used on the 17th at the time of the mock fight seen by me. It would appear to be one of those instances in which different installations vary.